

Faith in the future: Islam after the Enlightenment

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Bismi'llahi'r-Rahmani'r-Rahim

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, may I express my warm gratitude to you all for paying me the compliment of attending today? It is particularly gratifying to me to attend an event in this country, the only state established in recent history specifically as a homeland for Muslims. It is also a privilege to be associated with the name of the late and revered Altaf Gauhar, whose translations from the Qur'an certainly formed, back in the late 1970s, part of my own personal journey towards Islam

I want to talk about religion - our religion - and address the question of what exactly is going on when we speak about the prospects of a mutually helpful engagement between Islam and Western modernity. I propose to tackle this rather large question by invoking what I take to be the underlying issue in religious talk, which is its ability both to propose and to resolve paradoxes.

We might begin by saying that theology is the most ambitious and fruitful of disciplines because it is all about the successful squaring of circles. Most obviously, it seeks to capture, in the limited net of human language, something of the mystery of an infinite God. Most taxingly, it seeks to demonstrate that an omnipotent God is also absolutely just, and that an apparently infinite reward or chastisement can attend upon finite human behaviour. Most scandalously, it holds that we are more than natural philosophy can describe or know, and that we can achieve states of being in what we call the soul that are as movingly palpable as they are inexplicable. The Spirit, as the scriptures tell us, 'is of the command of our Lord, and of knowledge you have been given but little.' (17:85)

So we have a list of imponderables. But to this list the specifically Islamic form of monotheism adds several additional items. The first of these items is what we call universalism, that is to say, that Islam does not limit itself to the upliftment of any given section of humanity, but rather announces a desire to transform the *entire* human family. This is, if you like, its Ishmaelite uniqueness: the religions that spring from Isaac (*a.s.*), are, in our understanding, an extension of Hebrew and Occidental particularity, while Islam is universal. Hagar, unlike Sarah, is half-Egyptian, half-Gentile, and it is she who goes forth into the Gentile world. Rembrandt's famous picture of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael has Sarah mockingly peering out of a window. She is old, and stays at home; while Hagar is young, and looks, with her son, towards limitless horizons.

In the hadith, we learn that 'Every prophet was sent to his own people; but I am sent to all mankind' (*bu'ithtu li'l-nasi kaffa*). [1] This will demand the squaring of a circle - in fact

of many circles - in a way that is characteristically Islamic. Despite its Arabian origins, Islam is to be not merely *for* the nations, but *of* the nations. No pre-modern civilization embraced more cultures than that of Islam - in fact, it was Muslims who invented globalization. The many-colored fabric of the traditional *Umma* is not merely part of the glory of the Blessed Prophet, of whom it is said: 'Truly your adversary is the one cut off'. (108:3) It also demonstrates the divine purpose that this Ishmaelite covenant is to bring a monotheism that uplifts, rather than devastates cultures. Islam brought immense fertility to the Indian subcontinent, upgrading architecture, cuisine, music, and languages. Nothing could be more unfair than the Indian chauvinistic thesis, given its most articulate and insidious voice by V.S. Naipaul, that Islam is a traveling parochialism, an 'Arab imperialism'. [2]

That, then, has been another circle successfully squared - the bringing to the very different genius of the Subcontinent an uncompromising monotheism which fertilized, and brought to the region its highest artistic and literary moments. Mother India was never more fecund than when she welcomed the virility of Islam. Remember the words of Allama Iqbal:

*Behold and see! In Ind's domain
Thou shalt not find the like again,
That, though a Brahman's son I be,
Tabriz and Rum stand wide to me.* [3]

It is our confidence, moreover, that this triumphant demonstration of Islam's universalism has not come to an end. Perhaps the greatest single issue exercising the world today is the following: is the engagement of Islamic monotheism with the new capitalist global reality a challenge that even Islam, with its proven ability to square circles, cannot manage?

As Muslims, of course, we believe that every culture, including the culture of modern consumer liberalism, stands accountable before the claims of revelation. There must, therefore, be a mode of behavior that modernity can adopt that can be meaningfully termed Islamic, without entailing its transformation into a monochrome Arabness. This is a consequence of our universalist assumptions, but it is also an extension of our triumphalism, and our belief that the divine purposes can be read in history. *Wa-kalimatu'Llahi hiya'l-'ulya* - God's word is uppermost. (9:40) The current agreement between zealots on both sides - Islamic and unbelieving - that Islam and Western modernity can have no conversation, and cannot inhabit each other, seems difficult given traditional Islamic assurances about the universal potential of revelation. The increasing number of individuals who identify themselves as entirely Western, and entirely Muslim, demonstrate that the arguments against the continued ability of Islam to be inclusively universal are simply false.

Yet the question, the big new Eastern Question, will not go away this easily. Palpably, there are millions of Muslims who are at ease somewhere within the spectrum of the diverse possibilities of Westernness. We need, however, a theory to match this practice. Is the accommodation real? What is the theological or *fiqh* status of this claim to an

overlap? Can Islam really square this biggest of all historical circles, or must it now fail, and retreat into impoverished and hostile marginality, as history passes it by?

Let us refine this question by asking what, exactly, is the case against Islam's contemporary claim to universal relevance? Some of the most frank arguments have come from right-wing European politicians, as part of their campaign to reduce Muslim immigration to Europe. This has, of course, become a prime political issue in the European Union, a local extension of a currently global argument.

Sometimes one hears the claim that Muslims cannot inhabit the West, or - as successful participants - the Western-dominated global reality, because Islam has not passed through a reformation. This is a tiresome and absent-minded claim that I have heard from senior diplomats who simply cannot be troubled to read their *own* history, let alone the history of Islam. A reformation, that is to say, a bypass operation, which avoids the clogged arteries of medieval history and seeks to refresh us with the lifeblood of the scriptures themselves, is precisely what is today underway among those movements and in those places which the West finds most intimidating. The Islamic world is now in the throes of its own reformation, and our Calvins and Cromwells are proving no more tolerant and flexible than their European predecessors. [4]

A reformation, then, is a bad thing to ask us for, if you would like us to be more pliant. But there is an apparently more intelligible demand, which is that we must pass through an Enlightenment. Take, for instance, the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn. In his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, he writes: 'Christianity and Judaism have gone through the laundromat of humanism and enlightenment, but that is not the case with Islam.' [5]

Fortuyn is not a marginal voice. His funeral at Rotterdam Cathedral, reverently covered by Dutch television, attracted a vast crowd of mourners. As his coffin passed down the city's main street, the Coolingsingel, so many flowers were thrown that the vehicle itself almost disappeared from sight, recalling, to many, the scenes attending the funeral of Princess Diana. The election performance of his party a week later was a posthumous triumph, as his associate Hilbrand Nawijn was appointed minister for asylum and immigration. Fortuyn's desire to close all Holland's mosques was not put into effect, but a number of new, highly restrictive, policies have been implemented. Asylum seekers now have to pay a seven thousand Euro deposit for compulsory Dutch language and citizenship lessons. A 90 percent cut in the budget of asylum seeker centers has been approved. An official government enquiry into the Dutch Muslim community was ordered by the new parliament in July 2002. [6]

I take the case of the Netherlands because it was, until very recently, a model of liberalism and multiculturalism. Indeed, modern conceptions of religious toleration may be said to have originated among Dutch intellectuals. Without wishing to sound the alarm, it is evident that if Holland can adopt an implicitly inquisitorial attitude to Islam, there is no reason why other states should not do likewise.

But again, the question has not been answered. Fortuyn, a highly educated and liberal Islamophobe, was convinced that Islam cannot square the circle. He would say that the past genius of Islam in adapting itself to cultures from Senegal to Sumatra cannot be extended into our era, because the rules of that game no longer apply. Success today

demands membership of a global reality, which means signing up to the terms of its philosophy. The alternative is poverty, failure, and - just possibly - the B52s.

How should Islam answer this charge? The answer is, of course, that 'Islam' can't. The religion's strength stems in large degree from its internal diversity. Different readings of the scriptures attract different species of humanity. There will be no unified Islamic voice answering Fortuyn's interrogation. The more useful question is: *who* should answer the charge? What sort of Muslim is best equipped to speak for us, and to defeat his logic?

Fortuyn's error was to impose a Christian squint on Islam. As a practicing Catholic, he imported assumptions about the nature of religious authority that ignore the multi-centered reality of Islam. On doctrine, we try to be united - but he is not interested in our doctrine. On *fiqh*, we are substantially diverse. Even in the medieval period, one of the great moral and methodological triumphs of the Muslim mind was the confidence that a variety of *madhhabs* could conflict formally, but could all be acceptable to God. In fact, we could propose as the key distinction between a great religion and a sect the ability of the former to accommodate and respect substantial diversity. Fortuyn, and other European politicians, seek to build a new Iron Curtain between Islam and Christendom, on the assumption that Islam is an ideology functionally akin to communism, or to the traditional churches of Europe.

The great tragedy is that some of our brethren would agree with him. There are many Muslims who are happy to describe Islam as an ideology. One suspects that they have not troubled to look the term up, and locate its totalitarian and positivistic undercurrents. It is impossible to deny that certain formulations of Islam in the twentieth century resembled European ideologies, with their obsession with the latest certainties of science, their regimented cellular structure, their utopianism, and their implicit but primary self-definition as advocates of communalism rather than of metaphysical responsibility. The emergence of 'ideological Islam' was, particularly in the mid-twentieth century, entirely predictable. Everything at that time was ideology. Spirituality seemed to have ended, and postmodernism was not yet a twinkle in a Parisian eye. In fact, the British historian John Gray goes so far as to describe the process, which Washington describes as the 'war on terror' as an internal Western argument, which has nothing to do with traditional Islam. As he puts it: 'The ideologues of political Islam are western voices, no less than Marx or Hayek. The struggle with radical Islam is yet another western family quarrel.' [7]

There are, of course, significant oversimplifications in this analysis. There are some individuals in the new movements who do have a substantial grounding in Islamic studies. And the juxtaposition of 'political' and 'Islam' will always be redundant, given that the Islamic, Ishmaelite message is inherently liberative, and hence militantly opposed to oppression.

Nonetheless, the irony remains. We are represented by the unrepresentative, and the West sees in us a mirror image of its less attractive potentialities. Western Muslim theologians such as myself frequently point out that the movements which seek to represent Islam globally, or in Western minority situations, are typically movements which arose as reactions against Western political hegemony that themselves internalized substantial aspects of Western political method. In Europe, Muslim community leaders who are called upon to justify Islam in the face of recent terrorist activities are ironically often

individuals who subscribe to ideologized forms of Islam, which adopt dimensions of Western modernity in order to secure an anti-Western profile. It is no surprise that such leaders arouse the suspicion of the likes of Pim Fortuyn, or, indeed, a remarkably wide spectrum of commentators across the political spectrum.

Islam's universalism, however, is not well represented by the advocates of movement Islam. Islamic universalism is represented by the great bulk of ordinary mosque-going Muslims who around the world live out different degrees of accommodation with the local and global reality. One could argue, against Fortuyn, that Muslim communities are far more open to the West than vice-versa, and know far more about it. Muslims return from the mosques in Cairo in time for the latest American soaps. There is no equivalent desire in the West to learn from and integrate into other cultures. On the ground, the West is keener to export than to import, to shape, rather than be shaped. As such, its universalism can seem imperial and hierarchical, driven by corporations and strategic imperatives that owe nothing whatsoever to non-Western cultures, and acknowledge their existence only where they might turn out to be obstacles. Likewise, Westerners, when they settle outside their cultural area, almost never assimilate to the culture, which newly surrounds them. Islam, we will therefore insist, is more flexible than the West. Where they are intelligently applied, our laws and customs, mediated through the due instruments of *ijtihad*, have been reshaped substantially by encounter with the Western juggernaut, through faculties such as the concern for public interest, or *urf* - customary legislation. Western law and society, by contrast, have not admitted significant emendation at the hands of another culture for many centuries.

From our perspective, then, it can seem that it is the West, not the Islamic world, which stands in need of reform in a more pluralistic direction. It claims to be open, while we are closed, but in reality, on the ground, seems closed, while we have been open.

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I think there is force to this defense. But does it help us answer the insistent question of Mr Fortuyn? Do we have to pass through his laundromat to be made internally white, as it were, to have an authentic and honored place of belonging at the table of the modern reality?

Historians would probably argue that since history cannot repeat itself, the demand that Islam experience Enlightenment is strange, and that if the task were attempted, it cannot remotely guarantee an outcome analogous to that experienced by Europe. If honest and erudite enough, they may also recognize that the Enlightenment possibilities in Europe were themselves the consequence of a Renaissance humanism which was triggered not by an internal European or Christian logic, but by the encounter with Islamic thought, and particularly the Islamized version of Aristotle which, via Ibn Rushd, took fourteenth-century Italy by storm. The stress on the individual, the reluctance to establish clerical hierarchies which hold sway over earthly kingdoms, the generalized dislike of superstition, the slowness to persecute for the sake of creedal difference: all these may well be European transformations that were eased, or even enabled, by the transfusion of a certain kind of Muslim wisdom from Spain.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Christian and Jewish Enlightenments of the eighteenth century did not move Europe in a religious, still less an Islamic direction. Instead, they moved outside the Moorish paradigm to produce disenchantment, a desacralising of the world, which opened the gates for two enormous transformations in human experience. One of these has been the subjugation of nature to the will (or more usually the lower desires) of man. The consequences for the environment, and even for the sustainable habitability of our planet, are looking increasingly disturbing. There is certainly oddness about the Western desire to convert the Third World to a high-consumption market economy, when it is certain that if the world were to reach American levels of fossil-fuel consumption, global warming would soon render the planet entirely uninhabitable.

The second dangerous consequence of 'Enlightenment', as Muslims see it, is the replacement of religious autocracy and sacred kingship with either a totalitarian political order, or with a democratic liberal arrangement that has no fail-safe resistance to moving in a totalitarian direction. Take, for instance, the American Jewish philosopher Peter Ochs, for whom the Enlightenment did away with Jewish faith in God, while the Holocaust did away with Jewish faith in humanity. As he writes:

They lost faith in a utopian humanism that promised: 'Give up your superstitions! Abandon the ethnic and religious traditions that separate us one from the other! Subject all aspects of life to rational scrutiny and the disciplines of science! This is how we will be saved.' It didn't work. Not that science and rationality are unworthy; what failed was the effort to abstract these from their setting in the ethics and wisdoms of received tradition. [8]

Here is another voice from deep in the American Jewish intellectual tradition that many in the Muslim world assume provides the staunchest advocates of the Enlightenment. This time it is Irving Greenberg:

The humanistic revolt for the 'liberation' of humankind from centuries of dependence upon God and nature has been shown to sustain a capacity for demonic evil. Twentieth-century European civilization, in part the product of the Enlightenment and liberal culture, was a Frankenstein that authored the German monster's being. [...] Moreover, the Holocaust and the failure to confront it make a repetition more likely - a limit was broken, a control or awe is gone - and the murder procedure is now better laid out and understood. [9]

The West is loath to refer to this possibility in its makeup, as it urges, in Messianic fashion, its pattern of life upon the world. It believes that Srebrenica, or Mr Fortuyn, are aberrations, not a recurrent possibility. Muslims, however, surely have the right to express deep unease about the demand to submit to an Enlightenment project that seems to have produced so much darkness as well as light. Iqbal, identifying himself with the character Zinda-Rud in his *Javid-name*, declaims, to consummate the final moment of his own version of the Mi'raj: *Inghelab-i Rus u Alman dide am*: 'I have seen the revolutions of Russia and of Germany!' [10] This in a great, final crying-out to God.

We European Muslims, born already amid the ambiguities of the Enlightenment, have also wrestled with this legacy. Alija Izetbegovic, the former Bosnian president, has discussed the relationship in his book *Between East and West*. A lesser-known voice has been that of the Swedish theologian Tage Lindbom, who died three years ago. Lindbom

is particularly important to European Muslim thought because of his own personal journey. A founder member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, and one of the major theorists of the Swedish welfare state, Lindbom experienced an almost Ghazalian crisis of doubt, and repented of his Enlightenment ideology in favour of a kind of Islamic traditionalism. In 1962 he published his book *The Windmills of Sancho Panza*, which generated enough of a scandal to force him from his job, and he composed the remainder of his twenty-odd books in retirement. For Lindbom, the liberation promised by the Enlightenment did not only lead to the explicit totalitarianisms which ruined most of Europe for much of the twentieth century, but also to an implicit, hidden totalitarianism, which is hardly less dangerous to human freedom. We are now increasingly slaves to the self, via the market, and the endlessly proliferating desires and lifestyles which we take to be the result of our free choice are in fact designed for us by corporation executives and media moguls.

There can be no brotherhood among human beings, Lindbom insists, unless there is a God under whom we may be brothers. As he writes: ‘The perennial question is always whether we humans are to understand our presence on this earth as a vice-regency or trusteeship under the mandate of Heaven, or whether we must strive to emancipate ourselves from any higher dominion, with human supremacy as our ultimate aim.’ [11]

He goes on as follows:

Secularization increasingly becomes identified with two motives: the reduction of human intelligence to rationalism, and sensual desire; the one is grafted onto the vertebral nervous system, and the other is a function of the involuntary and subconscious elements of man’s composite nature. Rationalism and sensualism will prove to be the mental currents and the two forms of consciousness whereby secularization floods the Western world. Human pride, superbia, the first and greatest of the seven deadly sins, grows unceasingly; and it is during the eighteenth century that man begins to formulate the notion that he is discovering himself as the earthly agent of power. [12]

Lindbom’s works have provoked sharp discussion among Western Muslims in the universities. Enlightenment leads to sensualism and to rationality. Walter Benjamin has already seen that it cannot guarantee that these principles will secure a moral consensus, or protect the weak. It also - and here Lindbom has less to say - yields its own destruction. Western intellectuals now speak of post-modernism as an end of Enlightenment reason. Hence the new Muslim question becomes: why jump into the laundromat if European thinkers have themselves turned it off? Is the Third World to be brought to heel by importing only Europe’s yesterdays? [13]

These are troubled waters, and perhaps will carry us too far from our purpose in this lecture. Let me, however, offer a few reflections on what our prospects might look like if we excuse ourselves the duty of spinning in Mr Fortuyn’s machine.

Islam, as I rather conventionally observed a few minutes ago, speaks with many voices. Fortuyn, and the new groundswell of educated Western Islamophobia, have heard only a few of them, hearkening as they do to the totalitarian and the extreme. Iqbal, I would suggest, and Altaf Gauhar, represent a very different tradition. It is a tradition which insists that Islam is only itself when it recognizes that authenticity arises from

recognizing the versatility of classical Islam, rather than taking any single reading of the scriptures as uniquely true. *Ijtihad*, after all, is scarcely a modern invention.

Iqbal puts it this way:

The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change. A society based on such a conception of Reality must reconcile in its life the categories of permanence and change. [14]

In other words, to use my own idiom, it must square the circle to be dynamic. The immutable Law, to be alive, even to be itself, must engage with the mill wheel of the transient.

One of Altaf Gauhar's intellectual associates, Allahbakhsh Brohi, used the following metaphor:

We need a bi-focal vision: we must have an eye on the eternal principles sanctioned by the Qur'anic view of man's place in the scheme of things, and also have the eye firmly fixed on the ever-changing concourse of economic-political situation which confronts man from time to time. [15]

We do indeed need a bi-focal ability. It is, after all, a quality of the Antichrist that he sees with only one eye. An age of decadence, whether or not framed by an Enlightenment, is an age of extremes, and the twentieth century was, in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, precisely that. Islam has been Westernized enough, it sometimes appears, to have joined that logic. We are either neutralized by a supposedly benign Islamic liberalism that in practice allows nothing distinctively Islamic to leave the home or the mosque - an Enlightenment-style privatization of religion that abandons the world to the morality of the market leaders and the demagogues. Or we fall back into the sensual embrace of extremism, justifying our refusal to deal with the real world by dismissing it as absolute evil, as *kufir*, unworthy of serious attention, which will disappear if we curse it enough.

Traditional Islam, as is scripturally evident, cannot sanction either policy. Extremism, however, has been probably the more damaging of the two. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both narrate from A'isha, (*r.a.*), the hadith that runs: 'Allah loves kindness in all matters.' Imam Muslim also narrates from Ibn Mas'ud, (*r.a.*), that the Prophet (*salla 'Llahu 'alayhi wa-sallam*) said: 'Extremists shall perish' (*halaka 'l-mutanatti'un*). Commenting on this, Imam al-Nawawi defines extremists as 'fanatical zealots' (*al-muta'ammiquun al-ghalun*), who are simply 'too intense' (*al-mushaddidun*).

Revelation, as always, requires the middle way. Extremism, in any case, never succeeds even on its own terms. It usually repels more people from religion than it holds within it. Attempts to reject all of global modernity simply cannot succeed, and have not succeeded anywhere. A more sane policy, albeit a more courageous, complex and nuanced one, has to be the introduction of Islam as a prophetic, dissenting witness *within* the reality of the modern world.

It should not be hard to see where we naturally fit. The gaping hole in the Enlightenment, pointed out by the postmodern theologians and by more skeptical but still anxious minds, was the Enlightenment's inability to form a stable and persuasive ground for virtue and hence for what it has called 'citizenship'. David Hume expressed the problem as follows:

If the reason be asked of that obedience which we are bound to pay to government, I readily answer: *Because society could not otherwise subsist*; and this answer is clear and intelligible to all mankind. Your answer is, *Because we should keep our word*. But besides that, nobody, till trained in a philosophical system, can either comprehend or relish this answer; besides this, say, you find yourself embarrassed when it is asked, *Why we are bound to keep our word?* Nor can you give any answer but what would immediately, without any circuit, have accounted for our obligation to allegiance. [16]

But why are we bound to keep our word? Why need we respect the moral law? Religion seems to answer this far more convincingly than any secular ethic. In spite of all stereotypes, the degree of violence in the Muslim world remains far less than that of Western lands governed by the hope of a persuasive secular social contract. [17] Perhaps this is inevitable: the Enlightenment was, after all, nothing but the end of the Delphic principle that to know the world we must know and refine and uplift ourselves. Before Descartes, Locke and Hume, all the world had taken spirituality to be the precondition of philosophical knowing. Without love, self-discipline, and care for others, that is to say, without a transformation of the human subject, there could be no knowledge at all. The Enlightenment, however, as Descartes foresaw, would propose that the mind is already self-sufficient and that moral and spiritual growth are not preconditions for intellectual eminence, so that they might function to shape the nature of its influence upon society. Not only is the precondition of the transformation of the subject repudiated, but the classical idea, shared by the religions and the Greeks, that access to truth itself brings about a personal transformation, is dethroned just as insistently. [18] Relationality is disposable, and the laundromat turns out to be a centrifuge.

Religion offers a solution to this fatal weakness. Applied with wisdom, it provides a fully adequate reason for virtue and an ability to produce cultural and political leaders who embody it themselves. Of course, it is all too often applied improperly, and there is something of the Promethean arrogance and hubris of the *philosophes* in the radical insistence that the human subject be enthroned in authority over scriptural interpretation, without a due prelude of initiation, love, and self-naughting. Yet the failure of the Enlightenment paradigm, as invoked by the secular elites in the Muslim world, to deliver moral and efficient government and cultural guidance, indicates that the solution *must* be religious. Religious aberrations do not discredit the principle they aberrantly affirm.

What manner of Islam may most safely undertake this task? It is no accident that the overwhelming majority of Western Muslim thinkers, including Lindbom himself, have been drawn into the religion by the appeal of Sufism. To us, the ideological redefinitions of Islam are hardly more impressive than they are to the many European xenophobes who take them as normative. We need a form of religion that elegantly and persuasively squares the circle, rather than insisting on a conflictual model that is unlikely to damage the West as much as Islam. A purely non-spiritual reading of Islam, lacking the vertical dimension, tends to produce only liberals or zealots; and both have proved irrelevant to our needs.

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The most recurrent theme of Islamic architecture has been the dome surmounting the cube. Between the two there are complex arrangements of arabesques and pendentives.

Religion is worth having because, drawing on the infinite and miraculous power of God, it can turn a circle into a square in a way that delights the eye. Through logic and definition the theologian seeks to show how the infinite engages with the finite. Imam al-Ghazali, and our tradition generally, came to the conclusion that the Sufi does the job more elegantly, while not putting the theologian out of a job. But Sufism also, as Iqbal and the consensus of Muslim theologians in the West have seen, demonstrates other virtues. Because it has been the instrument whereby Islam has been embedded in the divergent cultures of the rainbow that is the traditional Islamic world, we may suppose that it represents the best instrument available for attempting a ‘dissenting’ Muslim embedding within today’s inexorable global reality. It insists on the acquisition of compassion and wisdom as a precondition for the exercise of *ijtihad*, or of any other mode of knowing. Its emphasis on the potential grandeur of man’s condition, of the one who was ‘taught all the Names’, makes it more humane than any secular humanism. In short, its recognition of the limitations of rational attempts to square the circle of speaking of the metaphysical and in justifying virtue, can bring us to real, rather than illusory, enlightenment, to a true *ishraq*. This is because there is only one ‘Light of the heavens and the earth.’ (24:35) Seeking truth in the many, while ignoring the One, is the cardinal, Luciferian error. Its consequences for recent human history have already been tragic. Its prospects, as it yields more and more methods of destruction, and fewer and fewer arguments for a universal morality, are surely unnerving. Genetic engineering now threatens to redefine our very humanity, precisely that principle which the Enlightenment found to be the basis of truth. In such a world, religion, for all its failings, is likely to be the only force, which can genuinely reconnect us with our humanity, and with our fellow men.

Wa’Llahu’l-Musta’an.

NOTES

1. Bukhari, Tayammum, 1.
2. The view is expounded most forcefully in his recent *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (London, 1998). For a refutation see T.J. Winter, 'Some thoughts on the formation of British Muslim identity', *Encounters* 8:1 (2002), 3-26.
3. *Persian Psalms (Zabur-i 'Ajam), translated into English verse from the Persian of the late Sir Muhammad Iqbal by Arthur J. Arberry.* (Lahore, 1948), 8.
4. The defining demand of the Reformation was the return to the most literal meaning of Scripture. Hence Calvin: 'Let us know, then, that the true meaning of Scripture is the natural and simple one, and let us embrace and hold it resolutely. Let us not merely neglect as doubtful, but boldly set aside as deadly corruptions, those pretended expositions which lead us away from the literal sense.' (John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Edinburgh, 1965), 84-5. Is this what the West is demanding of us? That a Muslim state should, in consequence, be a 'city of glass', like Calvin's terrified Geneva?
5. Cited in Angus Roxburgh, *Preachers of Hate: The Rise of the Far Right.* (London, 2002), 163.
6. Roxburgh, 160, 169, 174.
7. *The Independent* July 28, 2002.
8. Peter Ochs, 'The God of Jews and Christians', in Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder and Oxford, 2000), 54.
9. Irving Greenberg, 'Judaism, Christianity and Partnership after the Twentieth Century', in Frymer-Kensky, *op. cit.*, 26.
10. Iqbal, *Javid-Nama*, translated from the Persian with introduction and notes, by Arthur J. Arberry (London, 1966), 140.
11. Tage Lindbom, *The Myth of Democracy* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 18.
12. *Ibid.*, 22.
13. The implications of the collapse of Enlightenment reason for theology have been sketched out by George Lindbeck in his *The Nature of Doctrine: religion and theology in a postliberal age* (London, 1984), and (for a more Islamic turn, because explicitly resistant to those Renaissance-Aristotelian confidences of Suarez which took Thomism so far from *kalam*) in the several works of Jean-Luc Marion. The Ash'arite resonances are clear enough: discourse is self-referential unless penetrated by the Word.
14. Iqbal, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, cited in Allahbakhsh Brohi, *Iqbal and the Concept of Islamic Socialism* (Lahore, 1967), 7.
15. Brohi, *op. cit.*, 7.
16. David Hume, *Essays* (Oxford, 1963), 469.
17. For example, the 2002 World Health Organisation document *World Report on Violence and Health*, shows the murder rate in the Eastern Mediterranean region to be

less than half the rate for the Americas. See http://www5.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/download.cfm?id=0000000559, page 7.

18. This has been discussed with particular clarity by Michel Foucault, *L'Hermeneutique du sujet: Cours au College de France (1981-2)* (Paris, 2001), pp.16-17. Foucault's pessimism might be further reinforced by considering the corrosive implications of the new *biology*, with its anti-egalitarian potential, for secular reasons for conviviality and mutual respect. Cf. W.D. Hamilton, *Narrow Roads of Gene Land*, vol. II (Oxford, 2001), for whom evolutionary theories 'have the unfortunate property of being solvents of a vital societal glue.'